Gendering Activism, Exile and Wellbeing: Chilean Exiles in the UK

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Abstract

Drawing on the case of Chilean exiles in the UK this article looks at the experiences of exiles through a gender lens. The analysis argues for the need to recognise the gendered nature of spaces of political activism in order to highlight the contribution made by many Chilean women to life in exile. Using a gender lens sheds light on the multiple ways in which many women were indirectly the victims of abuse under the military regime and how this impacts on their mental health and wellbeing. The analysis also provides new insights into how forced migration impacts on gender roles and norms among those living in exile. The article primarily focuses on the experiences of women who arrived in the UK as the 'wife of' political activists, a group whose needs have been frequently overlooked.

Keywords: Chile; exile; forced migration; gender; health; UK

Introduction

The importance of addressing the health and wellbeing of refugees is now widely acknowledged, particularly in the case of forced migration where people are fleeing from conflict. While biomedical approaches dominate these debates (Summerfield, 2000), critics have argued that this gives little space for individuals to identify their own needs and priorities while failing to acknowledge the social, political and economic factors shaping refugees' lives (Watters, 2001). Yet even less attention has been given to the gendered nature of these processes and what this means for health and wellbeing. Women are frequently absent from policy debates and, where they do feature, they tend to be seen as either passive victims of sexual violence or as mothers with urgent reproductive health needs. These simplistic dichotomous approaches are clearly limited, offering little insight into the gendered nature of forced migration and exile. The article argues for a more inclusive approach to understanding what it means to be a refugee; one that

acknowledges how the experiences leading to forced migration are gendered and considers the implications for shaping their future health and well-being.

Drawing on the case of Chilean exiles in the UK the article argues that gender-blind approaches to refugee health and well-being obscure the needs of many women and in particular those who arrive as the 'wife of' political activists, who are mostly invisible to policy makers. The article starts with an overview of theoretical insights from feminist literatures exploring how a gender lens can be applied to the experiences of ‘refugee-ness’. Yet, as the Chilean case demonstrates, while women arriving as the 'wife of' political prisoners are likely to have a range of unmet needs, they are rarely mere 'passive victims'. Broadening out our understanding of political activism and shedding light on what occurs in the private as well as the public sphere reveals high levels of activism among women both in Chile prior to their exit, but also in the UK where it has been central in shaping their experiences as refugees. As the article highlights, many of the women Chilean exiles spent a considerable amount of time carrying out gendered activities as an integral part of Chilean activism in the UK, firstly around solidarity links in the 1970s and 1980s and subsequently for other activism, including around the detention of Pinochet in London in 1998. Nevertheless, the health and wellbeing of these women is rarely considered and many experienced trauma as a direct consequence of their gendered roles and responsibilities - for example as wives, mothers and carers. Yet, as the article determines, these needs are frequently seen to be inconsequential in comparison to those who were tortured and imprisoned.

The analysis considers what the Chilean case offers to wider debates around changing gender roles and norms in the context of migration. Studies from the health field have highlighted how health seeking behaviour is frequently shaped by gender norms, particularly in relation to mental health (Chan et al., 2010; Vogel et al., 2014), therefore any insights into

possible entry points for change are invaluable. Feminist scholars Mahler and Pessar (2001) propose focusing on 'gendered geographies of power' in order to ascertain change. Within this framing they emphasise a range of factors, including the ways in which individuals are located within hierarchies of power. They point to the need to understand the 'multiple dimensions of identity shape, discipline and position people and they ways they think and act (*ibid* 2001: 446). At the same time it is necessary to understand the 'types and degrees of agency people exert given their social locations' i.e. 'gendered geographies of power' (op.cit).

Refugees and exile: the need for a gender perspective

Malkii (1995: 495) argues for the need to look at both the historical construction as well as the different discursive and institutional domains within which the terms 'refugee' and/or 'being in exile' are constituted. In the main the term 'refugee' gained credence in the context of post WW2 Europe and was later consolidated in the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention, which defines the term 'refugee' and outlines the rights of the displaced as well as the legal obligations of states to protect them. Subsequent work - both theoretical and practical - has often been closely linked to understanding the policy needs of refugees and exiles and while shaping the debates in particular directions and leading to an uncritical use of a policy-based definition of the term refugee - and by extension of exile (Black, 2001). In the main policy debates are underpinned by functionalist approaches that assume a universal 'refugee experience' composed of distinct stages and has tended toward essentialising refugees regardless of background, age, sex, gender, class or other identity marker. Yet as Black (2001) notes, given the dominant focus on security issues (i.e. how to 'manage' refugees), it is perhaps not surprising that the debates have been predominantly gender blind.

Feminist critics have highlighted the implicit male bias in the 1951 Convention (Crawley, 2000; Greatbatch, 1989; Indra, 1989), while others have also challenged the inherent heteronormativity enshrined within it and its failure to recognise the ways in which individuals suffer human rights abuses on account of their sexuality (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2014). Indra (1989) contends that it was not until the exodus of Indochinese refugee in 1978-81 that women were first conceptualised as refugees in their own right. Prior to this gender was completely absent from both academic and policy debates around refugees and humanitarian aid.

Significant advances have been made in terms of integrating gender perspectives into refugee theory and practice. It is now widely acknowledged that women make up a significant proportion of refugee populations and may indeed have specific gender-based needs as a consequence of human rights abuses. Nevertheless, limitations remain regarding the ways in which 'gender' has been integrated into refugee and asylum debates and discourse (Hyndman, 2010). The framing of refugees has arguably become more complex, with new distinctions made between 'those who wait' in refugee camps and are deemed to be 'authentic' refugees but are portrayed as passive and feminised victims (regardless of gender), compared to 'those who move in' attempting to seek asylum and are viewed through masculinist lenses as politicised, self-serving individuals who pose a threat to state security in the Global North (Yeoh and Ramdas, 2014).

Yet women are frequently portrayed as 'vulnerable victims' of male sexual violence while ignoring other forms of resistance and repression. This not only creates a problematic hierarchy of oppression and suffering but also fails to recognise the ways in which gendered norms and power relations are politically and legally maintained (Crawley, 2016: 323). Moreover, women's experiences become depoliticised and de-contextualised, relying on essentialist notions of

refugee women as passive victims from backward ‘Third World’ cultures (Oswin, 2001; Schrijvers, 1999). At the same time the focus on 'women' rather than gendered social relations means that ways in which men may also be persecuted for failing to personify standards of masculinity is frequently overlooked (Oswin, 2001). Where female refugees are recognised as political activists there is a tendency to view them as 'strong' women in contrast to the rest of womankind who are viewed as vulnerable and passive. Schrijvers (1999) advocates the need to move away from such simplistic dichotomies and recognise that women and indeed men can combine both strength and vulnerability depending on her or his situation and personal history and the specific context in which s/he is approached (1999: 330). It is also necessary to caution against an over-reliance on rigid categorisation and bear in mind Malkii's (1995) assertion that

> the term refugee has analytical usefulness not as a label for a special, generalisable “kind” or “type” of person or situation, but only as a broad, legal or descriptive rubric that includes within it a world of socio-economic statuses, personal histories, psychological or spiritual situations (1995:498).

I do not wish to reinforce simplistic approaches that seek to essentialise refugees but instead aim to contribute to developing an analytical gender lens that captures the realities faced by women and men in experiencing what it means to be a refugee. Research points to the importance of the context of exit and arrival into exile for shaping the long term health of refugees (Correa-Velez et al., 2015; McMichael et al., 2015), and therefore a clearer understanding of the diverse needs of those who have been forced to migrate is essential.

Making visible women's political activism

One limitation of refugee discourse is that discussion of human rights abuses has tended to focus on the denial of civil and political rights while ignoring the state-led abuses of social and

economic rights (Crawley, 2000). A 'human rights centred' understanding of persecution that recognised the diverse nature of abuses would enable wider acknowledgement of the gender and racialised-based nature of persecution and capture the diverse nature of persecution against women and indeed men. Greatbatch (1989) contends that there is a need to recognise how deliberate measures intended to undermine economic and social rights, for example under authoritarian regimes, such as the Pinochet regime in Chile, can have a highly detrimental and gendered impact and amount to human rights abuses, particularly where governments also place severe restrictions on women's reproductive rights and limit their ability to perform their gender roles - for example as both mothers and workers.

Discussion and legislation around human rights abuses and defining refugees has predominantly focused on public spaces while ignoring what occurs in private spaces. Given that much of women's time is likely to be spent in the private sphere whereas men frequently spend more time in the public sphere, this can have the unintended consequence of a male bias whereby abuses of women's right in the private sphere are frequently unrecognised. The tacit subject in refugee law is a free, autonomous, rational contract-making individual whose rights are violated in the public sphere by the state (Oswin, 2001; Salcido and Menjívar, 2012). Moreover, 'the key criteria for being a refugee are drawn primarily from the realm of public sphere activities dominated by men' (Indra, 1987, cited in Kelly, 1993: 628).

In response, feminist critiques have shed light on the structural features of political life that exclude women from positions of power while revealing the histories of women's participation in political action (Pieper Mooney, 2009; Dore and Molyneux, 2000). Moreover they have challenged the tendency to separate the public space of politics and employment from the private space of family and interpersonal relations (Crawley, 2000). Where women are

visibly involved in political activity they are often doubly punished - both for their political opposition but also for transgressing gendered social norms.

In an attempt to incorporate and recognise the gender differences in political participation, distinctions have been made between 'formal' and 'informal' political activities. Drawing on feminist critiques of citizenship, scholars, such as Lister (2003) and Yuval-Davis (1997), have emphasised the need to widen our understanding of what constitutes citizenship politics while not discounting the importance of tackling the barriers to women's involvement in formal politics. As empirical research demonstrates, this can be particularly important for women in the context of migration (Jackson, 2016).

Since women are frequently excluded from the public political realm they are often unaccustomed to articulating their demands in terms of individual, social and political rights. Consequently, their needs beyond those directly related to their role as caregivers are frequently overlooked. Women may be forced to negotiate between their maternal responsibilities to secure a safe future for their children while simultaneously trying to gain control over their new circumstances. Moreover, women are often socialised to confine themselves to the microsystem of the family and household so do not think of themselves as 'political' individuals (Korac, 2004: 31).

Chilean exiles in the UK

The Chilean case is an important one, given the longevity of the Chilean exile community in the UK. The majority of Chilean refugees arrived in the UK in the early to mid 1970s and many have continued to live in Britain. Their knowledge offers a unique insight into a hard to reach community and the ways in which they have experienced being a refugee for the past four decades. In particular their stories can offer important insights into how people cope over the

long term with life after displacement and the implications of this for health and wellbeing.

Although the term ‘exile’ can be used in diverse ways (Lumsden, 1999), in the Chilean context it has been used to refer to those individuals and their families who were exiled from the country following the brutal military coup led by Augusto Pinochet on 11th September 1973. It has been suggested that around 200,000 Chileans were exiled internationally, 3000 of who came to the UK (Hirsch, 2015: 2). Since the return to more democratic forms of government in 1990 some have suggested that Chilean exiles should now be considered as ‘post exiles’ as despite the (theoretical) possibility of returning to Chile, many exiles continued to live in their adopted countries (Olsson, 2009; Roniger, 2015). Several studies highlight the challenges of return migration for those who were exiled under Pinochet (c.f. Hirsch, 2015, Roniger, 2015). It is however important to note that many Chileans in the UK continue to self identify as political exiles and therefore I use the term 'exile' in my discussion here. No reliable figures exist on the number of Chileans who returned 'home' but anecdotal evidence suggests that as many as half those who were exiled to the UK have since returned (personal correspondence with Alan Phillips, World University Service General Secretary 1973-1981).

Unlike subsequent waves of migrants from Latin America the Chilean community is now relatively dispersed throughout the UK with active communities remaining in London and South Yorkshire. This is a reflection of both the length of time that has passed since their arrival in the UK and the fact that since the majority of the Chilean exiles were given full refugee status they did not face any of the potential constraints on movement endured by more recent arrivals to the UK.

For many UK-based Chilean exiles, the arrest and subsequent detention of General Pinochet in London in 1998 proved a defining moment in the more recent history of the

community. Pinochet's detention in the UK lasted for 503 days while a decision was made as to whether or not to extradite him to Spain to place him on trial for human rights abuses. During this time numerous Chileans and their supporters carried out a continuous protest outside the Surrey house where he was detained. As Ramirez argues

> the public appearance of an intergenerational group of exiles and their claim for justice...brought to light the existence of those who were assumed to be assimilated and gone (2012: 44).

For many Pinochet's detention marked the start of a new phase of political activism and healed some of the political divisions between exile groups as they overcame their differences for a common cause. Moreover, for some the arrest also brought some personal solace as the public recognition that he had been arrested for human rights abuses reinforced that they were not 'guilty' of any crimes but that they had been persecuted by the military regime (personal communications with author). The fallout from the 'Pinochet effect' following his UK arrest also contributed to a shift in the landscape of transitional justice processes within Chile. One significant change was the extension of the range of crimes for which former military agents were being charged and convicted, moving away from a exclusive focus on deaths and disappearances to include torture and forced exile (Collins, 2009: 9). This clearly impacted on the exile community in the UK, with many families becoming directly engaged with the transitional justice process (https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/nov/10/money-will-not-compensate-torture-chile-pinochet)

The Study

Empirical material in this article draws on oral histories conducted by the author with first

generation Chilean exiles. All the interviews were conducted between September 2014 and November 2015 with Chileans currently living in London, the South East and South Yorkshire. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from Birkbeck, University of London and pseudonyms are used throughout to protect the identity of respondents. Forty interviews were conducted and three focus groups were also organised (two of these only included female participants while the third was an all-male group). Interviews with other key informants - including individuals who worked with refugee and human rights organisations concerned with bringing Chileans to the UK in the 1970s - also occurred. Participants were initially recruited through personal contacts within the Chilean community and subsequently through snowballing effects. Participants were given the option of conducting the interview in English or Spanish and in the main, English was used; interviews were conducted in the participant's home. It is important to acknowledge that there was a certain in-built bias within my sample as it only included individuals who were willing to talk about their experiences of exile and my findings cannot claim to represent the community as a whole.

Respondents ranged in age from mid 60s to mid 80s and twenty-one (9 women and 12 men) of the respondents had been imprisoned during the military dictatorship. The rest included ten women who arrived as the 'wife of' political prisoners (though in some cases were now divorced), two men and one woman political activists who had been advised to leave in order to avoid incarceration and the remainder included the spouses of the political activists or people, who while not necessary on a 'hit list', had left as they were worried about their personal safety or that of their families. Although the majority of all political prisoners exiled from Chile were men, as my sample illustrates, women were also imprisoned and later exiled. Nevertheless, in the main the focus of this particular article will be on the women who arrived as the 'wife of' a

political prisoner, rather than those women who were imprisoned or seen as a direct threat to the regime and therefore had to leave. The majority of respondents in the wider study (both women and men) had been educated to university level but others were involved in blue-collar work in Chile before coming to the UK and had been targeted because of their political activism. All of the respondents had been given refugee status following their arrival into the UK. Again my sample composition reflects the fact that my main point of entry to the Chilean community has been via academic connections and so is not an accurate representation of the exile community in the UK.

I used oral history methods to interview respondents as a means of giving voice to many of those who have been marginalised from mainstream accounts of the period. With the passing of time respondents are able to make more sense of traumatic experiences, to re-evaluate them and tell a story that is more clearly understood by an 'outsider' (Allison, 2004). While some details may be forgotten in the re-telling of the story this does not undermine its validity - indeed Browning (2010) argues that over time 'public memories' can shift and more sensitive issues, which may not have been easily voiced in the immediate aftermath of events can be more clearly articulated. In using oral history methods I was also conscious of the ways in which the narrator's choice of stories told reflect social identification and found that women and men's stories were shaped by gendered norms. Women tended to tell their stories in terms of personal relationships while men rarely mentioned family networks, instead predominantly focused on what they had done during the relevant time period (Bertaux-Wiame, 1979; Daley, 1998).

Gender and activism in exile

Chilean women in exile are engaged in a wide range of activities that while seen as traditional 'feminine' activities were also a means of protest and political solidarity. In the context of exile

cultural activities including craft, music and dance can become central to political activism and many Chileans - both women and men - engaged in these pursuits as a means of demonstrating their solidarity (Adams, 2012; Eastmond, 1993; Shayne, 2009).

The majority of women respondents regularly participated in cultural activities throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Several were involved in the establishment and running of Saturday schools for the children in the community. These were organised where there were sufficiently large exile populations. In South Yorkshire, the Chilean Saturday School offered sports and other cultural activities that brought the community together and enabled children to learn about their cultural heritage and of course speak Spanish. Respondents recalled the support and friendships they found in the Chilean community or through other forms of activism, especially in the early years of exile. Moreover, activism also offered an important coping strategy, particularly in the early years when the intensity of solidarity work meant that there was little time to think about one's problems and what had happened to them (Gideon, 2016).

Yet while many of the women were active in political solidarity work, here too roles were often gendered and they were frequently responsible for cooking food for events and fundraising rather than activities such as public speaking, which were the domain of the 'formal activist' refugees. Despite women's political activism both during the Allende Government and as part of the opposition movement under the military regime, women's maternal role was never questioned and continued to shape Chilean society (Thomas, 2013; Hiner, 2015). Indeed questions of gender equality were not part of the Popular Unity project and the absence of a gender critique meant that 'male-female relations were carried into exile largely unexamined' (Kay, 1988: 5). Several respondents hinted at these tensions, mostly in relation to their gender

roles where they looked after the children while their husbands travelled around the UK talking about their experiences in Chile.

> You know when people come here they wanted to give something back in a way so they got quite involved with the Chile Solidarity campaign. And at that time it was a big campaign so sometimes you felt that rather than being with you they were doing all this kind of activity…but also that sometimes you were left...not often but sometimes you said, oh why does he keeps going to that? And…and stay with us or go out with us or, but ...in general it wasn't really a big deal (Elena, 24th July 2015).

Ramírez (2014) reflects on the gendered nature of spaces of activism. For the Chilean community football played a central role in the early years of exile, both as a means of bringing people together to play sport but also as an opportunity for political activism and solidarity work. Yet within this space while the men played football and 'conducted politics', women cooked and sold Chilean meat pasties (*empanadas*) with the money raised used to fund solidarity work. Feminist critics have long pointed to the need to recognise the gendered nature of domestic spaces, particularly the kitchen, and acknowledge how women can appropriate this space and use it as a means of engaging with the public life of their communities (Christie, 2006; Meah, 2014). This is clearly evident in the Chilean case where women draw on their gendered roles and responsibilities as a means of exercising agency in the context of exile. Several women found the schools offered an opportunity to develop new support networks, replacing the family and kinship networks they had been forced to leave behind in Chile. For some the schools also offered a means of protection for their children from potential psychological damage as they felt it provided them with a sense of community and shared experience.

> Erika: We started to organise a Saturday school for Chilean children, and there we talked to them, we dealt with emotions, they didn't realise it as we were making activities for them. Going to the countryside, to the beach, all those kind of activities, and it helped a lot.

> Jasmine: And, and you think that's eased some of the potential difficulties they might have had? That that has helped them not to have psychological problems that can be associated with the children of exiles?
>
> Erika: Luckily we didn't have serious problems with the children... No, no terrible psychological problem really. No. Because the parents were very close, all the Chilean family were close and that helped a lot, no? (24th November 2015).

As Wright (2012: 10) notes, well-being is both objective and subjective. The former refer to personal circumstances, while the latter is based on both people's perceptions of what they feel that they can do as well as understanding where these perceptions come from and their frame of reference that causes them to feel the way they do about what is happening in their life. For many exiles these community-level relationships were - and continue to be - an integral part of their well being. This again reinforces the need to recognise the importance of the contribution of relational aspects of wellbeing to refugee and migrant communities (Wright, 2012).

The Chilean case is not unique in the ways in which rigid gender roles and norms are recreated in exile and men rather than women often set the agenda for preserving and redefining cultural heritage as a mechanism for coping with the trauma of up-rootedness (Moghissi, 1999; Shahidian, 1996). Diaspora political spaces tend to be dominated by homeland-oriented politics, which are frequently spaces that privilege masculine 'formal' citizenship practices. In contrast, women's activism tends to focus on issues related to family or fundraising activities. Women rarely take on decision-making roles - in part because timing of activities tends to conflict with domestic responsibilities (Goldring, 2010; Kay 1987). Where women challenge the mainstream agenda this can result in their marginalisation (Goldring, 2001; McIlwaine and Bermúdez, 2011). As my own study and the work of others have shown (Eastmond, 1993; Kay, 1987; Shayne, 2009), this often resulted in women pursuing different political agendas and becoming more

actively involved with feminist organisations. Yet this does confirm wider theoretical postulations that within the context of migration hegemonic gender regimes can be challenged, opening up new possibilities for confronting gendered norms and practices (McIlwaine, 2010). This has important implications for political activism, potentially creating new entry points for women in particular, although this is still shaped by class and life stage, pointing to the need for more intersectional analyses (McIlwaine and Bermúdez, 2011).

Gendered hierarchies of suffering

Taking a broader, gendered view of the ways in which refugees are defined allows for a more nuanced understanding of their diverse needs, particularly those who may not be the direct victims of torture. In the Chilean case, considerable attention was focused on the political prisoners themselves, while the needs of the 'wives of' male political prisoners were rarely considered (Kay, 1988; López, 1998). While many exiles were very conscious of the needs of the children, 'wives' requirements were completely overlooked - something which, as my study demonstrates, has continued to present day. Indeed when I commented to a woman ex-political prisoner that 'the wives' often became distressed during our interviews the response was 'What have they got to be upset about? Nothing happened to them'.

Yet many women I spoke to recounted experiences of trauma and living in a climate of fear, which significantly impacted on their health and well-being. Several women recounted being physically unwell during their early years in the UK, something they experienced as the physical impact of trauma. One respondent recounted:

> My temperature, my body temperature changed radically once we decided we were going to leave Chile and especially when we realised that there was no job, ...and it was summer but suddenly I had to wear a woollen jumper in the afternoon which ... had never happened to me

> and I did notice it. And then ...I had pains so bad that they almost operated on me for appendicitis but it was just, you know, colon pains, you know, IRB syndrome but extreme.

Her symptoms carried on in the early years in the UK but once her physical health improved she started to suffer from depression

> I continued studying, I was…health wise, I was much better I think that having a purpose and...but I was very depressed I remember arriving home by car, because everybody drove in those days and, thinking oh, I don't want to get out of the car. (Clara, 5th November 2014).

Eventually she received counselling and started to adapt to life in exile.

Several women retold stories of their husband's arrest and the fear they experienced when their homes were raided by the military police. In some cases men were tortured in the house with other family members present. One woman recalled how she pleaded with the military to allow her to take the children to her parents' house before they 'interrogated' her husband. Moreover, a number of women experienced harassment from the military while visiting their husbands in prison. Although it is now acknowledged that prison staff raped many women waiting to see their male relatives, none of my respondents had experienced this personally. One male respondent revealed that his sister had been raped while visiting him in prison. For many of the women the levels of harassment was quite distressing. One woman recounted visiting her husband in prison:

> And that wasn't a very nice experience you know because, well, you are young and so when you have to go in they...they used to search you and search more than they should have. But you have to just accept that as part of being able to visit him.

She subsequently realised that she was under military observation because her partner was in prison and at one point a soldier tried to befriend her in an attempt to extract information.

Other women had similar experiences with some reporting attempts to intimidate them, being followed as they went about their everyday lives and in one case even chased on the streets by a group of military men. Yet very few women had these experiences acknowledged as being traumatic for them and often suggested that because they had not been direct victims of torture they had not really 'suffered'. Other members of the exile community reinforced this view.

This points to what critics have termed 'a gendered hierarchy of suffering' where an overly narrow focus on sexual harm within the international human rights domain can obscure a wider understanding of the more everyday forms of gendered and racialised violence, as well as concealing the realities of women's daily life, which includes lack of access to social and economic rights (Boesten and Wilding, 2015). In the Chilean case this is not to undermine the horror and trauma of what women experienced in prison but it is also important to recognise the suffering of other women who were not political prisoners.

'Papering over' domestic violence

Although there is no evidence to show that refugee women are more likely to experience domestic violence compared to other women (Mason and Pulvirenti, 2013), they may face additional constraints, making them more vulnerable and less able to access support, particularly where women's own community may quietly condone the situation. Women refugees often cite loss of community networks as one of the main reasons for not reporting domestic violence (Mason and Pulvirenti, 2013), and my findings suggest that this is clearly an area that needs careful examination in the future.

An important concern raised by some of the women was the pressures they faced as 'heroes wives' (López, 1998). One respondent talked about the difficulties of having to attend solidarity events where she made and sold *empanadas* along with the other wives, and having to

behave as the ‘perfect wife’ of a man who had been a widely respected activist in Chile. Yet she explained how when they returned home he would become extremely violent but she felt unable to talk to anyone in the wider community about this because of his position (Interview with Ximena, 1st July, 2015).

This points to wider concerns around health and well-being. Gendered norms continue to shape Chilean women’s responses to abusive husbands and they are reluctant to confront the problem especially since wider societal norms permit men to behave in this way (Cianelli et al., 2008; Vandello et al., 2009). While other respondents reported anecdotally about women in the community who suffered domestic abuse, no one spoke about this directly in the interviews. This could also be seen as evidence of what Mason and Pulvirenti (2013) have referred to as a 'papering over' of domestic violence among former refugee communities. This refers to the different ways in which community members can ignore the issue of domestic violence in order to preserve a particular image of the community to the outside world. There are a range of tensions and vulnerabilities that emerge from the intersection of gender power relations and refugee status - the need to protect women from, and build resilience to, domestic violence committed by (mainly) male family members; and the need to protect the community at large from public condemnation and stereotyping, which is a damming obstacle to building resilience during resettlement (Mason and Pulvirenti, 2013). Here too the Chilean study points to the importance of a more longitudinal perspective and highlights how individuals' agency and resilience changes over time but also how the resilience of refugee communities can shift and potential new entry points for the discussion of sensitive subjects can emerge as communities become more embedded in the 'host' country.

Exile, loss and the challenge to women's gender identities

In the context of forced migration women may encounter difficulties when their identity as wives (and mothers) is completely undermined (Guruge et al., 2010). While men are also affected by the loss of family networks they tend to speak about family as a buffer against hardship and marriage difficulties whereas women tend to see family as a defence against loneliness (Shirpak et al., 2011).

Many of my respondents talked of the loss of their extended family, again highlighting the centrality of the subjective aspects of wellbeing alongside the importance of more material dimensions (Wright, 2012). Several women recalled the struggle they faced adapting to life without family networks. Some talked about feeling isolated particularly after children were born, and that the lack of family networks combined with the knowledge of events in Chile was overwhelming, with a number of women experiencing what they termed breakdowns in the early years of exile.

Maria spoke about her experience of life in Chile during the coup. She came from a family of Communist Party activists, although did not consider herself as politically active. She talked about the general climate of fear in the household and being stopped and searched by the military on her way home from university. She also subsequently discovered that a school very close to her house was a clandestine torture centre. After the birth of her second child, she became very depressed and very keenly felt the absence of her family, particularly her mother. She explained,

> Maria: I remember ... when my son was born, I think he was quite young; about eight months, and one day I felt terrible. I .. started to feel ...like… I couldn't breathe; it's like fear ... And then I think I probably had post traumatic, you know, depression?

> Jasmine: Post natal depression?
>
> Maria: Post traumatic, you know, after the birth, you know. Probably some people have it immediately and some people can have it even later.
>
> Jasmine: So, do you think, then, when you were suffering after the birth of your son and subsequently, do you think that that was all related to your experiences in Chile?
>
> Maria: I don't know. We were a very close family and I feel lonely. I feel lonely because I don't have friends... when you have a child, your mum is there. I know there are very strong women who went through greater tragedies but, for me, that was very, very hard. And, also, my mum never met my daughter... (Interview with Maria, 22nd November 2014).

It is interesting to note how Maria conflates 'post traumatic stress disorder' with 'post natal depression', as perhaps for her the two were linked. It is also notable that there is a significant time lag between her arrival in the UK and the birth of her second child, after which she experienced the 'breakdown', suggesting that feelings of depression do not necessarily manifest themselves in the early years of exile. It is not surprising that when people talk about past trauma small inaccuracies can creep into their narrative over time. Roseman (1999) suggests discrepancies occur when there is an inability to cope with the memory as it was so it becomes slightly modified in the telling of the story and the narrator is able to impose some kind of control over the memory. While there is nothing here to suggest that Maria's story has changed, her re-telling of her story could also represent an attempt to take control over what occurred and make sense of it both for herself and for the listener. Again it suggests that women are not just passive victims of forced migration but find different ways to express agency. Yet these inaccuracies can also lead to a questioning of the 'truth' of memories. As David Lowenthal observes,"[t]he need to use and reuse memorial knowledge, and to forget as well as to recall, force us to select, distil, distort and transform the past, accommodating things remembered to the

needs of the present" (1985: 194).

Moreover, memory is shaped by one's social environment and when entering a new 'thought community' (for example following migration) it is not unusual for individual's to reinterpret their memories in light of their new social context (Zerubavel, 1996). At the same time, it is important to take into account the influence of collective memories of past events (Lowenthal, 1985; Zerubavel, 1996), and this too might play a role in influencing the telling of Maria's story and her conflation of PTSD with post-natal depression, given the shared experiences of trauma across the Chilean exile community.

Challenging gender roles and norms

The challenges of post-migration settlement have been widely acknowledged - for example social isolation, poor housing and under/ un-employment. However, for some, these stresses can be further exacerbated when changes in circumstances also bring about challenges to gender roles and responsibilities. Men in particular may face difficulties in accepting that the ways of being a man/ husband/ father at 'home' are no longer viable or acceptable, particularly following forced migration (Guruge et al., 2010; McIlwaine, 2010; Shirpak et al., 2011). This can have severe implications for mental health and wellbeing (Guruge et al., 2010; Guruge et al., 2012), particularly since rigid gender norms have shaped health-seeking behaviour among Chileans (Cianelli et al., 2008). However, women can also find these changes challenging, especially where they have internalised the 'good housewife' role. The process of redefining household roles and responsibilities is therefore often 'partial and incomplete' (Kay, 1987: 124), which reflects broader observations around the limitations to changes in gender roles in the context of migration (McIlwaine, 2010).

My own findings reinforced these wider debates and many of the women spoke of their need to prioritise childcare because they lacked family or community support networks. My study also points to the importance of an intersectional approach, which, for example, can bring social class to the fore. In the research several middle class women had employed domestic labourers in Chile and had been able to take on paid work outside of the home. Taking on domestic duties in exile proved challenging for some women, many of who lacked basic domestic skills. One respondent, Clara, spoke of arriving in the UK alone with her three children and having to learn how to cook and shop so that she could provide food for them. She explained how she depended on some Chilean neighbours to teach her basic culinary skills.

Some women also spoke about how their relationships with their husbands had been governed by strong gender norms and that women were expected to retain their gendered roles despite the potential opportunities life in exile might offer. One woman explained how despite her domestic responsibilities her husband agreed for her to attend a local college but constantly monitored her movements.

> I still went to college here. He let me, but I cry every time because I remember when I was studying in college, and ... the frequency of the buses was terrible. So when I missed a bus, that meant that I was going to be a half an hour late, and so you cannot imagine the drama with that (Ximena, 1st July 2015).

The Chilean case has wider resonance, highlighting the diverse ways in which gender norms are maintained in the context of migration. Mahler (2001) demonstrates how kinship networks govern to maintain control over migrant women's behaviour and ensure they do not transgress social norms particularly around sexuality and sexual behaviour. Similarly Menjívar and Agadjanian (2007) show how women who are 'left behind' are 'kept in line' by migrant husbands through regular phone calls which are made at unpredictable times. The power

continues to lie with the men because the women lack the resources to buy telephones or pay for long phone calls.

Nevertheless, the Chilean case also shows how the situation can change over time and gender norms are not immutable. In Ximena's case although she remained married for over a decade after coming to the UK she eventually found the confidence to leave her husband. Although she knew that social norms in Chile would have made it difficult for her to be single parent and to find work but she felt more confident of these things in the UK. She had also developed friendships outside of the Chilean community who offered practical help when she left her husband, including alternative accommodation.

Another respondent recounted how men in the Chilean community had tried to prevent her from forming a new relationship with a British man. Her husband, a prominent left wing activist, had been murdered by the Chilean secret police and she had come to the UK alone with her young children. She subsequently met a new man who she eventually married. She described him as very sympathetic to the Chilean cause and indeed he supported her through a very difficult legal process where she sought justice for her husband's death. Yet several men in the Chilean community tried to prevent her new marriage and told her that she was betraying her husband's memory by not only re-marrying but by marrying out of the Chilean community. She obviously found this very distressing and distanced herself from the community, something that continues to the present day (Interview with Lucia, 18th September 2015).

Other women, particularly those who had not been formally active, also felt excluded from the 'community' when they failed to conform to expected gender norms. Several women commented how the strongly patriarchal norms that governed men’s behaviour left them feeling alienated from the community. For some, particularly single women, this was evident in men's

behaviour and they spoke of their patriarchal attitudes, frequently expressed in the form of lewd comments, which left them feeling awkward.

> Sometimes when I go to Chilean parties ... the men make me feel uncomfortable. They always tell me that you only have all these problems because you don't have a man... I have to just laugh though so I can still be part of the group. But I don't like it... (Interview with Ximena, 1st July 2015)

Some women opted to distance themselves from the Chilean community, but this left them without a support network:

> The other Chileans don't really talk to me... They don't ever help me, they think I am a snob but the thing is I don't like what the men say to me... (Interview with Rosario, 2nd July 2015)

Conclusions

In her discussion of gender and mobility Susan Hanson (2010) asks not only how does movement shape gender but also the more arguably neglected question of how gender shapes movement. By focusing on the experiences of Chilean exiles in the UK this article has applied both of these questions to the case of forced migration and looked at how gendered understandings of spaces of activism shape the ways in which men and women move as refugees and exiles. Once established in host countries these gendered understandings of who constitutes a 'genuine' refugee can continue to shape support mechanisms available to individuals and this can significantly impact on the long-term health and wellbeing of refugees and exiles. As the Chilean case demonstrates women played an important role in activism against the Pinochet regime but since much of this has occurred in the private sphere it has not been widely acknowledged and women who moved into exile as the 'wife of' male political activists are rarely seen as having

legitimate mental health needs relating to their experiences. The Chilean case makes clear how gender can shape movement and how this has serious longer-term implications when considering the health and wellbeing of refugees and exiles. The Chilean case also offers insights into Hanson's first question - i.e. how movement shapes gender. While the experiences of Chilean exiles has shown how patriarchal norms continue to influence the exile community and seek to control women's behaviour, mobility also offers women new ways of 'doing gender', enabling them to break with 'traditional' norms. For some this may mean cutting ties with their established social networks but mobility also offers women the ability to make these choices and contribute to reshaping hegemonic gender norms that govern women and men's behaviour.

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